Comparative Literature 1810.I                                                                       Dore J. Levy

Semester I, TH. 4:00-6:20  (Q hour)                                                              209 A/B Marston Hall

[Dore\_Levy@Brown.edu](mailto:Dore_Levy@Brown.edu" \t "_blank)                                                                                863-7975

Office hours:  T 12:00-4:00, and by appointment

***The Gates of Asia***

            This course will explore the growth of Western knowledge of Asia from early historiographical works, to the rise of the Mongol empire in the thirteenth century through the Great Game into the 20th century.  The primary sources for this exploration include three kinds of accounts by the intrepid travelers who set their hearts on Asian exploration:  personal narratives, official reports and dispatches, and scholarly studies of the exotic cultures largely unknown in Europe before the eighteenth century.  These travelers included men and women, independent and government agents, lone seekers and cultural ambassadors, whose records have a personal stamp which feeds on and feeds back into the cultural ethos of their times.  Combining literary and historical methods, we will explore how these travelers constructed their records to convey their personal discoveries and growth, as well as the facts, as they saw them, of startling exotic lands, peoples, and customs.

            Whatever the routes, the mystery of Asian exploration has its heart in Central Asia.  “Central Asia” is essentially a Western notion, what seemed a natural name for the land that occupies all that mostly high, mostly dry, invariably remote space separating the Near East from the Far East.  "Near" and "far" are terms relevant to a European sense of how the world is laid out.  Central Asia is, or was until only recently, the mysterious, forbidding, and often in fact forbidden territory that lies between.  Despite its remoteness, Central Asia has played a significant role in world history for at least three millennia – the influence of the Silk Road dates from antiquity and persists at least until the early decades of the 20th century.  While the cultures of Central Asia are distinct, they are by virtue of their remoteness provincial, and in fact are usually thought of in terms of spheres of influence from their geographical surround:  Iran, India, Russia, China.  The civilization of Central Asia has been determined by its geography in every sense of the word.  As the natural pathway between the two ends of the "Old World," the history of our knowledge of Central Asia is the history of the Western discovery of its place in the world, for better or worse.

            In a sense, this is a course in historical and imaginative geography.  The real center of our interest will be the travelers and explorers, ambassadors and scholars whose curiosity and sense of purpose, sometimes unabashedly acquisitive, discovered Central Asia as a territory with its own unique mix of history and cultures, transformed it from a way *to* somewhere into a destination in its own right, and created Central Asia as a category in the Western imagination.  And while history underpins this course, our method of approach will be through literature.  Much of this literature *is* historiography:  Herodotus and Sima Qian are the fathers of historiography in the West and East Asia, respectively.  But there are also other kinds of documents based on personal experience, and these are the heart of the course.

            I have divided the course into several temporal "zones," when activity at both ends of the Silk Road was particularly well documented.  The first zone focuses on the two ends of the Old World before the Mongols.  The second zone centers on the rise and fall of the Mongol empire.  The third zone is defined by the height of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries.  The fourth zone is the 20th century, with the impact of modernization on travel and culture.

            For each section, students are expected to frame and outline a research project on the material of the temporal zone.  This is not to be an essay, but rather a plan for research, and a description of materials for analysis.  You will share your projects as part of class discussion. The purpose is to improve your research skills, especially in the use of texts.  Each section project will be around 5 pages.  There will be a final project on a topic of the student’s choice, selected from your section projects, approved by the instructor (15 pages).  Weekly preparation, attendance and class participation are essential to the success of this course.

1.         9/4     *Introduction*

2.         9/11   *Introducing "Eurasia:" the two ends of the Old World before the Mongols*

                        Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 1-4.

                        Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* in The Landmark Herodotus (Robert B. Strassler, ed.), *The Histories*, Book IV (“Melpomene”), pp. 279-364, especially 320-338.

                        Ssu-ma Ch'ien (Burton Watson, trans.), *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 1, pp. 155-192 (on the Xiongnu) and on General Li Kuang (I.57-67)

                        Cai Yan (Dore J. Levy, trans.), *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*

Another resource:  Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies: the Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (ch. 5, "Those Who Draw the Bow," 161-205.

3.         9/18    *Journeys to the West in Search of the Law*

                        Arthur Waley, *The Real Tripitaka*, pp. 9-130.

Arthur Waley, *Monkey*, Chapters I-VIII, XIII-XXVIII

*or*

                       Anthony C. Yu, *The Monkey and the Monk*, Chapters 1-8, 12-17, 20-22, 26-27, 29-31.

Other resources:  Jeannette Mirsky, *The Great Chinese Travelers*, chapter 3, "Hsüan-tsang:  Prince of Pilgrims," 29-114.

                        Sally Wriggins, *Xuanzang:  a Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*

                        Fa Xian, *Records of the Buddhistic Kingdoms*

4.         9/25     *The Pax Mongolica*

*Project 1 Due!*

Arthur Waley, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, 217-291

Arthur Waley, *The Travels of an Alchemist:  the Journey of the Taoist Ch'ang-ch'un from China to the Hindukush at the Summons of Chingiz Khan*

Christopher Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, Chapter 8, “Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Conquests,” 183-203.

Other resources:

Bertold Spuler, *The Mongol Period.  A History of the Muslim World*

Ata-Malik Juvaini (John Andrew Boyle, trans.), *History of the World Conqueror*, Part II (chapters 14-20, pp. 396-460)

Jeannette Mirsky, *The Great Chinese Travelers*, chapter 4, "The Taoist Ch'ang-ch'un Goes to Visit Chinghiz Khan," pp. 119-171.

5.         10/2       *Western Travelers to the Mongol Empire*

                        Marco Polo (John Latham, trans.), pp. 7-162

6.         10/9     More *Western Travelers to the Mongol Empire*

                        Jacob D'Ancona (David Selincourt, ed. and trans.), *The City of Light* (selections)

                        Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia* (formerly *The Mongol Mission*), chapter on

                        William of Rubruck

Other resource:  Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia*, other chapters

7.         10/16     The Visual Culture of Central Asia

*Second Project due!*

                        special guest:  James Trilling

8.         10/23       Innocents Abroad

                        Alexander Kinglake, *Eothen*

Other resource:  John Chardin, *Travels in Persia 1673-1677*

9.         10/30     The Great Game

                        Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* and "The Man Who Would Be King"

Other resources: Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 293-524; *The Quest for Kim*

10.       11/6    Seekers and Secret Agents:  the Next Generation of Travelers

*Third Project due!*

                        Alexandra David-Neel, *My Journey to Lhasa*

11.       11/13    The Closing of Traditional Asia:  the New Central Asian Frontier

                        Owen Lattimore, *The Desert Road to Turkestan*

12.      11/20 The Communist Revolution

Colin Thubron, *The Lost Heart of Asia*

13. 11/27 No class

14. 12/4 Student reports on final projects

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12/11 Final Projects Due!